

Vice President of Education Grantmaking – Ascendium Education Group

Are you a highly experienced leader who has applied their breadth of content knowledge to transforming postsecondary education and workforce training systems? Are you a collaborative difference-maker who is adept at building relationships and guiding high-performing teams?

We're seeking a Vice President of Education Grantmaking to oversee a funding strategy aimed at improving the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds. In this role, you'll leverage your expertise, creativity, interpersonal intelligence, and analytic skills to guide strategic grantmaking of approximately \$150 million annually. You'll amplify and represent Ascendium's philanthropic priorities through strategic external engagement and help to foster collaboration across the organization in service of our mission.

Ideal Candidate

The Vice President for Education Grantmaking oversees a large and complex funding strategy that requires optimizing the talents and contributions of multiple individuals and teams within the Education Philanthropy division and across the broader organization. Success in the role requires:

- A **skilled collaborator** who's highly effective in building trusting relationships and creating a positive and constructive environment among direct reports, peers, and other key stakeholders.
- An **entrepreneurial problem-solver** adept at embracing and navigating ambiguity and engaging others in identifying creative solutions.
- An **expert communicator** able to strategically adapt messaging and style to align with the needs and objectives of key internal and external audiences.
- A **proven organizational leader** with experience developing and maintaining high-performing teams, leading through change with empathy, and acting with the highest standards of professional integrity.
- An **analytic thinker** committed to data-informed decision making and experienced in assessing and drawing on evidence to inform strategy.
- A **change agent** who's unsatisfied with the status quo and committed to deploying Ascendium's resources to create change that improves the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds.
- A **lifelong learner**, whose innate curiosity drives professional development opportunities for themselves and their teams to expand their current knowledge base and skills.

Job Responsibilities

On a day-to-day basis, you may do the following.

Grantmaking Strategy Leadership and Pipeline Management

- Oversee improvements to processes in facilitating the development, review, and approval of letters of inquiry and proposals, ensuring alignment with Ascendium's philanthropic strategy while maintaining a commitment to integrity, transparency, and rigor.
- Support the strategy deputy directors in developing and managing annual grantmaking budgets and workplans.

- Lead a process of semiannual strategy reviews in partnership with the Learning and Impact team and other colleagues within the Education Philanthropy division.
- Collaborate closely with the Learning and Impact team and the president to apply strategy learning and insights to help refine grantmaking strategy.
- Prepare reports and other materials to communicate strategy progress and learning to the board of directors, in partnership with the president and Learning and Impact team.
- Provide internal and external expertise and thought leadership on topics related to Ascendium's grantmaking strategy, maintain a network of partners and experts in related field(s), and represent Ascendium's philanthropy at strategic field engagements.
- Advise on strategic communications and field engagements related to advancing Ascendium's grantmaking strategy, in partnership with Ascendium's Strategic Communications team.
- Maintain relationships with other funders working in postsecondary education and workforce training to exchange information, share lessons, and leverage each other's efforts.
- Partner and collaborate closely with the president, other senior leaders at Ascendium, and the board of directors to monitor major developments in postsecondary education and workforce training and ensure alignment of Ascendium's grantmaking with emerging trends and relevant policy and economic contexts.

Team Development and Management

- Provide day-to-day support and supervision for deputy directors overseeing grantmaking strategies, including coaching, feedback, and professional development to support their growth and leadership.
- Recruit, vet, and onboard team members when the opportunity arises for new hires, in partnership with Human Resources and the president.
- Contribute to whole-division learning and professional development, including playing a leading role in designing and executing teamwide events such as all-staff retreats and learning sessions in partnership with Learning and Impact and Grants Management team leaders.
- Foster a culture of integrity, collaboration, and commitment to impact by modeling principled decision making and a focus on learning and continuous improvement.

Cross-Unit Collaboration and Leadership

- Collaborate with the director of learning and impact and the Learning and Impact team to draw insights, identify priority learning needs, support grantmaking team collaboration, and elevate learning across strategies.
- Collaborate with the director of grants management, the Grants Management team, and deputy directors to ensure efficient workflow, address concerns that emerge from financial due diligence reviews, and ensure that any grant administration issues are resolved in a timely manner.

- In collaboration with the leadership team, develop annual cross-team objectives, develop and be responsible for annual administrative and grantmaking budgets, and conduct periodic policy reviews.
- Collaborate closely with other key leaders and teams across the organization who support Ascendium's grantmaking, including Legal, Finance, Audit, and Strategic Communications, to ensure integrity and compliance in Ascendium's grantmaking processes and policies.
- Partner with the president and others on the leadership team to support the board of directors' engagement and learning about Ascendium's grantmaking strategy and key topics related to its mission.

Knowledge and Skill Requirements

A highly qualified candidate will possess the following.

- Knowledge equivalent to an advanced degree with training in social science, education, public policy, and/or related fields.
- At least five years in a senior leadership role with formal direct reports and demonstrated experience as an effective manager capable of fostering cultures of collaboration and teamwork.
- At least 10 years of experience working in postsecondary education or workforce training fields, adequate to have acquired deep familiarity with the landscape of key actors and constituents of the systems with which Ascendium's philanthropy engages.
- Experience working at or in partnership with philanthropic organizations, with an advanced understanding of philanthropic strategies and the role of funders in contributing to systemic change. Prior grantmaking experience is preferred.
- Strong understanding of the role of strategic communications in advancing systemic change and of policymaker and institutional/system leadership audiences and their concerns, incentives, and interests.
- Exceptional interpersonal skills exemplified by initiative, courtesy, diplomacy, a positive attitude, and a high bar of professional ethics and integrity.
- The ability to multitask and independently manage competing priorities in a fast-paced environment with grace, responsiveness, and good judgement.
- A commitment to Ascendium's mission of ensuring more learners from low-income backgrounds have the opportunity to achieve upward mobility through postsecondary education and workforce training.

About Ascendium

Ascendium is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has helped millions of learners pursue postsecondary education since 1967, when we were formed to help fulfill the promise of the landmark Higher Education Act of 1965. Over the years, we've grown to become the nation's largest federal student loan guarantor, providing information, tools, and counseling to help millions of borrowers nationwide avoid default and

keep the door to reenrollment open. Using our years of experience in the student loan industry, we've developed a suite of products and services that support academic achievement, financial wellness, and student loan repayment success.

We use the net proceeds from our business operations to fund our education philanthropy. Our strategic grantmaking provides funding to organizations that increase the number of learners from low-income backgrounds who succeed in postsecondary education and workforce training as a critical pathway to upward mobility, regardless of economic background, race, rurality, or history of incarceration. Through that grantmaking and related investments in evidence-building and strategic field engagement, we seek to identify emerging innovations and reforms, validate their effectiveness, and expand proven strategies to promote large-scale, systemic change.

Our philanthropy is focused on addressing systemic barriers to upward mobility, which derive from class disparities in opportunity, as well as from policies and practices of exclusion and discrimination. As we strive to continually strengthen our potential for impact, we take responsibility as a funder for learning and evolving our practice to ensure that our grantmaking reflects the root causes of barriers to opportunity for all learners from low-income backgrounds. To that end, we are committed to ongoing learning to build our internal capacity and strengthen the ability of our grantmaking to advance equitable opportunity.

Location

This position will initially be posted as requiring residence in or relocation to Madison, Wisconsin, where Ascendium Education Group is [headquartered](#). Madison-based employees have a hybrid schedule, working three days in the office and two days remotely, which provides the opportunity for valuable in-person collaboration. However, a remote hire may be considered if no qualified Madison-based candidates can be identified. Approximately half of the Education Philanthropy team works remotely from locations across the U.S. Not all locations are eligible for remote hire; eligibility depends on local and state tax and employment laws. Qualified candidates who are not based in Madison or able to relocate may apply and indicate as such, but should be aware that preference will be given to Madison residency.

Travel

The vice president should anticipate traveling domestically approximately one to two times per month (up to 30%) for professional conferences and meetings. If the vice president is not based in Madison, they should also expect to travel to Ascendium's headquarters at least four times yearly for all-staff retreats and board meetings.

Compensation

Expected total compensation for this position is \$250,000 to \$280,000, depending on experience. Ascendium Education Group uses an executive compensation model that rewards performance with bonus pay as a portion of total compensation, based on meeting annual strategic objectives and key results.

Benefits

Ascendium offers an [outstanding benefits package](#) designed to provide employees and their families with a high degree of security. These benefits include, but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive medical, dental, and vision insurance.
- Employer-provided legal insurance.
- Generous time off, including up to eight weeks of paid parental leave.
- Student loan repayment assistance and tuition reimbursement.
- Retirement savings plan with employer match.

Ascendium provides equal employment opportunity to all individuals regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, creed, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by state or federal law.

H-1B sponsorship (initiation or transfer) is not available for this position.

If you would like assistance with the application process, please email [Ascendium Human Resources](#). We invite all applicants to complete the Voluntary Affirmative Action questions when submitting application materials. The questions are found at the end of the online application process. To learn more about our commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity, please visit the [Ascendium Careers webpage](#).

Ascendium requires criminal, employment, and education background investigations before hiring.